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AUTHOR	Backus, Nick
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ABSTRACT

As the National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA) debate spreads across the country, as more schools and more students become involved in this type of debate, those involved in the activity need to take a step back and evaluate their progress, as well as plot their future. Coaches have a critical role as educators. NPDA needs clear organizational goals. If NPDA is to remain an alternative, it must be different from the other choices. The current state of National Debate Tournament/Cross Examination Debate Association (NDT/CEDA) is a case in point: as differences narrowed, CEDA became less and less an alternative to NDT. The development of CEDA should be viewed with an eye toward the evolution of NPDA. The threat to diversity comes in the form of modeling by both competitors and judges. Pluralism in forensics is crucial to the survival and growth of all parts of the activity. Forensics presents educators with unique opportunities for interaction with students. A direction for NPDA is the audience-centered model of debate, which holds debaters to the same standards other pubic speakers are expected to follow. (Contains 22 references.) (CR)

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Directions for Current and Future NPDA Programs in the 21st Century

Nick Backus

Washburn University

National Communication Association

New York

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N. Backus

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As NPDA debate spreads across the country, as more schools and more students become involved in this type of debate, those of us involved in the activity need to take a step back and evaluate our progress, as well as plot our future. The easy way to approach the future, the path of least resistance, is to look at our growth with smug satisfaction and pat ourselves on the back for a job well-done. After all, NPDA is growing rapidly both in terms of the number of schools participating and the number of students competing. However, to do this, to accept the current path, is to ignore exigencies in the structure and practice of NPDA debate which may shape the future of this activity. At the risk of sounding alarmist or dramatic, NPDA is at or nearing a crossroads in its development. To maintain NPDA as a distinct format choice, coaches must rededicate themselves as teachers of the audience-centered debate style.

NPDA is but a part of a much larger forensics community. This community is diverse and provides a forum for any number of voices. The notion of diversity in the forensics community is a positive one. Rather than serving the needs of a limited group of individuals, we are able to provide competitive and noncompetitive alternatives for widely ranging educational and individual needs. If this benefit of diversity is to remain manifest, positive steps must be taken to ensure the survival of alternatives, including NPDA.

Further, coaches have a critical role as educators. We serve our students, our institutions, and our discipline as we teach/coach successive generations of debaters. We must maintain this persona of educator. Only by continuing the education process can we keep the

NPDA alternative vital. The protection of diversity depends on proactive education within the NPDA sphere.

Of course, this begs the question: Educate about what, exactly? Herein lies the heart of the situation at hand: NPDA needs clear organizational goals. If we are to educate, there must be a curriculum. If we are to educate, there must be direction. This direction will be dictated by organizational imperatives as well as the requirements of the various groups to which we and our programs answer.

NPDA as Alternative

That NPDA is an alternative to other forms of debate should be self-evident. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. As we listen to debates in which the competitors bemoan the lack of "evidence" or hear attempts to sneak in incredibly specific information, we often ask, "What is the topic they are debating?" or "Which division is this?" It seems that the students in our charge often have different visions for NPDA than do many coaches. The point here is not to denigrate any other form of forensic activity or to silence controversy. Rather, put bluntly, if NPDA is to remain an alternative, it must, by definition, be different from the other choices. The current state of NDT/CEDA is case in point. As differences narrowed, CEDA became less and less an alternative to NDT. As a result, these two forms of debate, at one point very different, have, arguably, all but merged. Rather than increased diversity and choice, we are left with much less. Less diversity, less choice, and less in the way of educational opportunity for our students. In order to examine NPDA as an alternative, first, the nature of forensic diversity will be

examined. Then, the CEDA example will be explored as a cautionary tale for those of us desiring to maintain NPDA as distinctive.

Preston (1997) notes the great diversity of opportunity in the forensics community: "With NFA speaking events, AFA events, NFA Lincoln-Douglas debate, NEDA debate, CEDA/NDT team debate, NPDA debate, and APDA debate, choices abound" (p. 267). Most educators view these choices positively. Louden and Austin (1983), noting differences of emphasis in NDT and CEDA, "celebrate" those differences (p. 7). Remember that the position taken here is in promotion of diversity, not the advancement of one style of debate over the others. Clearly CEDA was promoted, at least my some and in part, as a alternative to NDT, not as its replacement. Jack Howe, referred to by some as the father of CEDA, suggests that, "CEDA provided an attractive alternative" to NDT (1983, p. 2). Dr. Howe's later public denunciations of CEDA's direction notwithstanding, this sentiment is echoed by others (Kelley, 1981; Tomlinson, 1981). CEDA, from its inception, was to be an alternative to NDT debate.

While the presence of CEDA as alternative is interesting, the NPDA community should view the development of CEDA with an eye toward the evolution of NPDA. When the original objectives of CEDA are remembered, they sound suspiciously like the goals many coaches have for NPDA. Howe (1981) states that, "CEDA began as a reaction against a prevailing style of debate that both participants and their directors found increasingly difficult to support" (p. 1). Specifically, Howe (1981) argues that, "CEDA debate is a [sic] variance with NDT debate in three major aspects: 1) in its attitude toward evidence; 2) in delivery techniques; and 3) in its emphasis on an

audience-oriented approach to debate" (p. 1). This would appear to form the foundation of the difference between NPDA and other debate formats.

And, just as NDPA and CEDA have similar origins, so, too, might they have similar futures. In a chillingly prophetic article, Willard (1985) predicted that CEDA would become more and more like NDT until they were virtually indistinguishable. Willard describes the growth of CEDA into what many would describe as the worst of NDT. He outlines a debate form characterized by insider jargon which excludes those not engaged in the activity. He refers to future-CEDA as an "ethnocentric mass of corruption. They all sound alike, think alike, and vote alike" (p. 3). Of course, any time spent on the parli-l or at an NPDA tournament would render for the listener, similar comments about the current NDT/CEDA configuration.

Where, then, is the risk? The threat to diversity comes in the form of modeling by both competitors and judges. While on the one hand, debaters are frequently castigated for sounding like CEDA, the push for the inclusion of pre-researched evidence, the increased use of NPDA jargon, the rejection of an audience broader than the judge of a particular debate, the growing acceptance of more rapid delivery, all presage an NPDA quite different from the one we see now, but one much closer to the NDT/CEDA model to which NPDA was a response. In order to derive the benefits of diversity and choice, alternatives must be maintained. Pluralism in forensics is crucial to the survival and growth of all parts of the activity.

Coaches as Educators

In Willard's (1985) tale of CEDA's future, he castigates coaches for their apparent lack of communication skills. While difference is fine, competent communication is a prerequisite to understanding and maximizing the benefits of diversity. Coaches, for the most part trained in communication studies, should know this. We who train our students to communicate effectively should take that teaching role serious. We should practice what we preach. In fact, I would extend that position: We must become proactive in our role as educators.

The apparent abdication of this educational imperative is endemic in the academy. Former University of California provost Page Smith laments that:

> The modern university has been criticized almost since its inception for its indifference to students. Periodically university presidents and critics of the university call for faculty members to take teaching more seriously. The presidents of Stanford and Harvard recently took their faculties to task for their neglect of teaching. Over the years none of these exhortations has had a noticeable effect (1991, p. 19).

In fact, these criticisms continue. Jon C. Strauss, president of Harvey Mudd College claims that, "Today's system of higher education is no longer serving students and society. It's too expensive, and it's not adequately preparing graduates to think and act in the real world" (1997, p. 15A). Galvin writes that, "Teaching, once the lynchpin of excellence at institutions of higher education, has declined in value over the past decades" (1992, p. 1).

While these general denunciations of the state of teaching provide a broader framework for our situation, we in communication, who should know better, are performing no better than our colleagues in other disciplines. Bartanen (1997) suggests that coaches are driven by short-term competitive goals rather than "long term educational goals of better communication theory and real world debate, speaking, and interpretation skills" (p. 62). She continues, charging that, "the reason we are not public enough and too competitively oriented and mean spirited and too wrapped up with ourselves and our events is because we have failed in recent times to be good forensics educators and to create good forensics educators" (1997, p. 63).

But what is a good forensics educator? Louden and Austin suggest that, "If forensics is indeed an educational activity, then the 'coach' should be guided by the desire to provide the best education possible to forensic competitors" (1983, p. 6). Frank argues that, "The end goal of academic debate should be the construction and cultivation of the debate student's rhetorical conscience" (1998, p. 325). Frank, in specific reference to audience-centered debate, further suggests that the key pedagogical question is, "how are we to teach students to make the right argumentative choices before the judges and audiences they address?" (1998, p. 325).

Galvin urges that, "Teaching begins with what the teacher knows but evolves to encompass the extension and transformation of knowledge" (1992, p. 3). This system involves both student and coach, but clearly the coach, as teacher, is the starting point, the touchstone of forensic education. It appears that often we meet the

need to include students in the process. A frequent NPDA ballot comment and a comment overheard often at tournaments is that, "I didn't want to vote that way, but they made the argument." While the realities of a particular debate create sufficient variance in the course of events to justify occasional comments such as this, in many instances, the judge/coach is abdicating her/his responsibility as an educator. How can the coach and the student engage in dialog over the structure and practice of the activity if the coach defers to the wishes of the student without resort to the dialectical process? All too often we substitute a "supportive environment" or the attitude that "it's for the 'kids'" for meaningful interaction and instruction. How can effective rhetorical choices be reinforced when poor choices win debates, regardless of the merit of the arguments presented?

Forensics presents us with unique opportunities for educational interaction with students. We get to know our students as they get to know us on a level not possible in the regular classroom. Further, the student and teacher share a particular area of interest (debate), which might not be the case in the classes we teach. However, we seem to have forgotten who is the student and who is the teacher. Instead, we must maximize this instructional opportunity. As teachers, we benefit. Our students benefit. And, as Bartanen suggests, "Forensics education fits well within the mission of liberal arts education for the twenty-first century" (1998, p. 13). This is a chance we cannot afford to pass by.

NPDA Goals

In order to meet the challenge of educating our students, NPDA must have clear organizational goals which respond to the various

constituencies to which we answer. Backus (1997) identifies several groups to which most programs must answer: students, university administrators, and the broader university community. How does NPDA fit in with these goals? What goals does NPDA have? Therein lies the problem. While we can identify broad goals for forensics, the goals of NPDA vary widely from coach to coach and student to student.

Alexander (1997) offers several goals of forensics (broadly defined). First on his list is that:

> Forensics is a co-curricular educational activity in which students put communication (rhetorical, philosophical, political, interpretation) skills and theory into practice. This includes all aspects of communication, including, but not limited to, expression, research, writing, organization, logic, and listening skills (p. 277).

Bartanen echoes Alexander's priorities, emphasizing the public deliberation aspect of forensics:

> For me, preparation of students for public deliberation is the central purpose of forensic education. This is the traditional mission of our work, expressed in the dual objectives of enhancing students' communication skills and nurturing their potential for leadership (1997, p. 55).

Certainly, these are laudable goals, worthy of implementation. So, then, what role should NPDA play?

The problem is that NPDA goals are unclear. Al Johnson, in a history of NPDA, identifies the early movers and shakers in the organization, but does not mention any reason for NPDA's formation.

The community, though, suggests a model. Hicks notes a commonly held view on the purpose of NPDA debate: "Parliamentary debate, for instance, strives to emulate the standards of public debate and deliberation" (1998, p. 353). Williams suggests that, "Parliamentary debate attempts to create an audience, other than that of forensics coaches, by adapting roles from the House of Parliament" (pp. 364-365). NPDA, as envisioned by many, is essentially audience-centered (see also Whitney, 1996). A direction for NPDA, then, is the audience-centered model of debate--debate as part of the public forum.

Sadly, we seem not to follow this public model. Williams suggests that, "We teach our public speaking and debate students that audience analysis and adaptation are of critical importance. However, we participate in an activity that would appear at times to limit, overly-restrict, or outright ignore the role of audience in the act of communicating" (1998, p. 363). This audience focus is goal centered. Frank explains that, "If we are to encourage audience-centered debate, we should do so with some pedagogical goals in mind" (1998, p. 330). And actually, these goals are quite straightforward.

Essentially, the goal of the audience-centered debate is to hold debaters to the same standards other public speakers are expected to

follow. Weiss explains:

> The public debate paradigm is simple enough to explain. It subscribes to the assumption that tournament debaters should meet the same standards of excellence that would apply in other public forums, ranging from the classroom to the legislative hall. Debate should constitute a model of the type of reasonable and accessible discourse that makes democratic deliberation possible (1998, p. 332).

Certainly, we can agree as to what those standards are. Any public speaking text is based on the same criteria. Thus, rather than developing complex goals and strategies, perhaps we should go back to basics. Teaching all of our students the skills of public speaking seems a reasonable educational objective.

Of course, not everyone will find this an acceptable goal for NPDA. Hicks (1998) claims that many see debate styles as a choice between content and delivery--one, but not both. Hunt (1997) exemplifies this attitude, suggesting that NDT/CEDA debaters learn critical and creative thinking skills, while parliamentary debaters learn delivery skills. Of course, even the first time teaching assistant in a public speaking course recognizes that these goals are attainable simultaneously. In parliamentary debate, we must remember that balance. In addition to delivery, we must emphasize the research end of preparation. Although not ignored currently, the importance of speech content must but underscored. Epstein, for instance, (1996) discusses how to be well-read. Backus (1997) discusses the mutually reinforcing activities involved in parliamentary debate, extemporaneous speaking, and impromptu speaking.

And what of those constituencies? Students seems to be well served by public speaking instruction in class and in parliamentary debate. Administrators, who obviously support the educational goals of their departments of communication, should readily see the applicability of these goals. And the university community can feel pride in seeing students trained for public deliberation. As Hicks notes, "the best parliamentary debaters, like the best public servants, reflect on and speak to the ethical implications of policy dilemmas in a manner that actually reconfigures the context of public discourse" (1998, p. 354).

Conclusion

NPDA is at a crucial time in its growth and development. The course we take in the future will determine the kind of debate we end up with. With care, we can maintain NPDA as another alternative available to the forensics student. Rather than ignoring our role as educators, coaches must be proactive in the education process, teaching our students what we see as the goals of parliamentary debate--never forget who is the coach. The development of the audience-centered debate model seems particularly suited to the pedagogical needs of both student and teacher.

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